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DIRECTORATE OF
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Intelligence Memorandum

The Extreme Left in Chile—Another Headache for Allende

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
17 May 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Extreme Left in Chile—Another Headache for Allende

Summary

The Chilean Movement of the Revolutionary Left is the only significant group to the left of President Allende's Popular Unity coalition. Benefiting from the protection of Allende without sharing the government's responsibilities, it has enjoyed a year of unhindered activity and growth. Now, however, the Movement is under increasing pressure to moderate its policies and join the coalition. As Allende tries to consolidate his gains and prepare for national elections next March, the Movement has become a threat both to the formation of closer bonds among the parties of Popular Unity and to the government's appeal to the uncommitted voter. Socialists and Communists—who make up the major part of Allende's coalition government—differ sharply in their views of the organization. How Allende deals with this conflict will have a significant impact on his ability to keep peace within the coalition. It could also put new strains on Allende's relations with the armed forces.

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and co-ordinated within CIA.

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Background

1. The Movement of the Revolutionary Left first emerged as a significant political force when it won the university elections at Concepcion in 1967. Since then it has expanded to other areas of the country, but most of its support still comes from present and former university students. The leadership, which includes the sons of the Concepcion University rector and a nephew of President Allende, has been militant since 1967. The Movement has maintained close relations with the Cubans since the mid-1960s, and has accepted Cuban training. Unlike similar groups elsewhere in Latin America, it has never faced a serious attempt to repress it. The few members imprisoned under the Frei administration were granted amnesty by Allende when he took office.

Role Under Allende

2. With a sympathetic Allende in the presidential palace, the Movement dropped some of its former secrecy. It soon was clear that the national police had orders not to interfere with activities designed to speed up the revolutionary process launched by the Allende government. This situation allowed the Movement to lead peasants in seizing landed estates in the rural areas before official plans for expropriation could be carried out, to continue its efforts to organize and radicalize the urban poor, and to try to break the Communist Party's control over the Chilean Trade Union Confederation. Not only was the Movement given a free hand in the political arena, but it was able to obtain government funds through officials of the agrarian reform and development agencies. It therefore no longer needed to depend on bank robberies and other criminal acts to finance its operations.

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The crowds it brings out for street demonstrations and the favorable climate for recruitment under Allende suggest that the membership now is between one and three thousand, with possibly a larger number of sympathizers in various front groups. Most members come from middle or upper class families, and many carry prominent names. This concentration of education, privilege, and experience has equipped the Movement to carry out audacious and well-planned paramilitary operations, but class differences have tended to exclude working class members from the Movement. Although the Movement is an elitist vanguard rather than a mass movement, it still has been able to organize and work with lower class groups.

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Relations with Allende and the Popular Unity Coalition

4. The Movement has enjoyed friendly relations with Allende at least since he was nominated for the presidency in 1970, and probably since early 1967. In the period before the election it apparently promised Allende that it would call off violence during the campaign in order to avoid giving substance to a "law-and-order" appeal from the other candidates. The release of all its members arrested under the Frei administration may have been a part of the price Allende paid for this cooperation.

5. Allende's relations with the Movement after his inauguration continued to be friendly. At his request, it provided him with a personal bodyguard, known as the Group of Personal Friends, which has grown to a full-fledged security force. The Movement had demonstrated its potential worth to Allende

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For its part, the Movement doubted that Allende really intended to carry out a true socialist revolution, and wanted to be in a position to keep an eye on him. In mid-1971 the Movement ostensibly withdrew from the bodyguard unit

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7. But the growing political disadvantages of violence have forced Allende to take action to counter the Movement's attempts at social disruption. Although the President has publicly stated that no one seeking social justice will be repressed, the police have been asked to prevent further illegal acts and to return seized property in those instances where the Movement has acted in defiance—rather than ahead—of government policy. Allende would like to see a general lessening of rural violence, and the police have been confiscating weapons when these are discovered in the normal course of business.

8. Coupled with his decision to limit violence are Allende's negotiations with the Movement to bring it into his governing coalition. The addition of

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the Movement to the government would have the advantage of keeping its more extreme activities in check. But it would also set up new problems for Allende. The chief snag would be the disapproval of the Communists, who have engaged in frequent and heated polemics with the Movement, which they consider an example of leftist infantilism. In addition to wanting to avoid another competitor within the government, the Communists believe the Movement would be a serious liability to the entire Popular Unity slate in the 1973 congressional elections.

9. On the other hand, top leaders of the other mainstay of the coalition, the Socialist Party, view attacks on the Movement as a betrayal of the revolution. Most members of the Movement who had any previous political affiliation were Socialists, and the left wing of the Socialist Party and the Movement are in close agreement. (Both favor a more rapid revolutionary transformation of the entire Chilean economic, social, and political structure.) Faced with the conflicting positions of the Communist and Socialist parties, Allende would find it most difficult to arrive at arrangements with the Movement that would be acceptable to both parties.

10. While the Socialists and Communists argue with Allende over the role of the Movement, portions of the youth wings of some coalition parties are negotiating with the Movement to form a unified command of paramilitary groups to defend the revolution in case of a military or rightist coup attempt. Involved in this activity are the Socialist Party, the youth organization of the Radical Party, and the two radical left Christian organizations. The Communists are forming their own "self-defense" units for the same purpose. The Movement has demonstrated its influence by radicalizing sectors of the political parties and forcing them, albeit reluctantly, to copy some of its methods.

The Movement in the Countryside

11. Although primarily made up of urban students, the Movement has been most active during Allende's administration in rural areas, especially in the southern provinces. There has been some training of members in paramilitary tactics in isolated areas, but the main purpose of rural activity has been to speed up the government's agrarian reform and to widen land expropriation beyond that allowed by the present law. To accomplish these ends, the Movement of Revolutionary Peasants was formed. This group has been occupying large and medium-sized farms and holding them until the official agrarian reform agency can arrange the legal aspects of land transfer.

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12. The mainstay of the Movement's strength in the rural south are the Mapuche Indians, who have been neglected by the political parties. The Indians have been placed on reservations, where they are living in squalor and are suffering from severe population pressure and unemployment. Seeking to redress what they consider just grievances, the Mapuches in December 1970 started driving the hated white farmers from land they had occupied near the reservations. These essentially non-political acts by the Indians encouraged the Movement to spread land seizures throughout the South. The organization was by no means responsible for all the illegal seizures, however; during 1971, less than one quarter of land grabs could be traced to members of the Movement or its allies, the rest were spontaneous imitations or sponsored by other political groups. Most seized land, except in Cautin Province, was quickly taken over by the Agrarian Reform Agency.

13. In the last few months, the rural activities of the Movement have often conflicted with government agrarian reform plans. With the supply of large estates dwindling rapidly, the Movement has turned to smaller farms, often less than the legal size for expropriation. Because of the variable factors in the reform law, farms of up to 1,000 acres are exempt from expropriation in most parts of the south. These farms are generally worked by resident owners, whose entire income was obtained from the land. Unlike the oligarchs, who could retire to comfortable townhouses when they lost their land, these smaller farmers had considerable incentive to stay and fight for their property. Their resistance made the agrarian question a politically explosive one for Allende. To preserve what credibility he has among moderates, the President recently allowed the police to protect the property of some small farmers. This decision brought Allende and the Movement into conflict.

The Movement in the Cities

14. During the Frei administration, the Movement was very active in the cities, working through an action front called the Movement of Revolutionary Settlers to obtain land and houses for slum dwellers and squatters. While the urban poor had won some attention from supporters of Frei, change had not come fast enough to satisfy most, and spokesmen from the Movement found a ready audience among them. Most of the available urban land and incomplete housing units had been seized before Allende's inauguration, however, and the cities were quiet during his first year in office.

15. When the Movement turned its attention back to the cities at the end of last year, it threatened a stronghold of the Communist Party.

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[REDACTED] The Front of Revolutionary Workers, founded in late 1971, provides it access to industries, especially textile manufacturers, around Santiago. The Front is still too new to pose a serious challenge to Communist domination of organized labor, but it is running a slate of candidates in the elections for leaders of the Chilean Trade Union Labor Confederation and has been encouraging strikes to exploit local issues.

Infiltration of the Armed Forces

16. The Movement has been targeting on the armed forces for several years. The military discovered scattered cells of Movement members among its ranks in 1970, and the military equipment and uniforms used in urban guerrilla operations provide evidence that the Movement has penetrated at least some military security screens.

17. The Movement apparently sees two possible benefits from contacts with the military. First, it might acquire advance intelligence on any plot to overthrow Allende. Secondly, it might convince military officers and enlisted men that the "revolution" is not hostile to their profession and that only those who conspire with the opposition can expect problems. Political parties have in the past tried to keep the armed forces out of politics, but since Allende's election the military has been subject to much attention from both the government and the opposition. As a result, the Movement's interest in the armed forces is less conspicuous than it would have been in the past.

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Prospects

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18. Since it never has faced serious repression, the Movement has an aura of success in its operations that it goes to some length to maintain. In its years of active existence, it has made some significant gains, notably among the urban poor and landless peasants. Its original power base, the universities, may be weakening if the poor showing of the Movement's candidates in recent university elections is any indicator. And the Movement has some serious internal problems. The most acute is the narrow class base from which it draws its militants. Some of its few working class members have left the Movement because they felt inferior to the better educated

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majority. Although the Movement has continued to work with the lower classes as outsiders, and to help them form their own radical groups in the front associations, it has been unable to grow into the kind of mass organization it once envisaged because of its elitist membership. To add to the Movement's problems, most of the easy targets have now been exploited, and the government parties are active competitors for the remaining opportunities. In entering the field of organized labor, [redacted]

[redacted] it has taken on the powerful Communist Party, which may prove to be a more formidable opponent than absentee landlords. In spite of these problems, however, the Movement remains a dynamic force. It has reached a period of stabilization, not of decline.

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19. The Movement's main argument with the government is over the pace of the revolution, not its final ends. But the Movement also holds that the revolution cannot be made within the existing political structure. Time may diminish the importance of both of these differences, for the disagreement is in strategy rather than goals. In this event, the Movement could at some time fit into the government. In fact, Allende is now negotiating with the Movement with this end in mind. However the Movement goes, Allende is in large part responsible for allowing the organization to obtain a position of independent power to the left of his government. How he deals with this problem will have a significant impact on next year's elections, his ability to keep peace within the coalition, and his relations with the armed forces.

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